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SUBJECT Secretary of State Alexander Haig

SANDER VANOCUR: Our guest, Alexander Haig, Secretary of State, who met with President Reagan in California this past week to deal with crises all over the world, with the increasing militancy of Libya's President Qaddafi, with the continued turmoil between the Israelis and the Arabs in the Middle East, and with the constant threat of a nuclear war with the Soviet Union.

Secretary of State Haig will be interviewed by diplomatic correspondent Barrie Dunsmore. And I'm Sander Vanocur, ABC News chief diplomatic correspondent.

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VANOCUR: Our guest is Secretary of State Alexander Haig.

Mr. Secretary, you were once Chief of Staff at the White House. Had you been Chief of Staff at the White House last week, would you have gone and telephoned President Reagan and told him about the engagement off the Libyan coast?

SECRETARY OF STATE ALEXANDER HAIG: Well, it's hard to say. I think each situation has its own unique factors, and no one is the same as before.

I think, in this instance, Ed Meese was exactly right. I spoke to Ed very briefly after we first learned of the incident. And I think we both concluded that until we knew more, it would not be worthwhile to notify the President. And I think Ed did so before the issue became a matter of public knowledge, and when we had the full facts before us -- that is, both Cap Weinberger and myself and Bill Casey.

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VANOCUR: Mr. Secretary, you took some abuse at the time of the assassination attempt on President Reagan.

SECRETARY HAIG: I've taken a lot of abuse over a number of years. Yes.

VANOCUR: Well, this was the most recent and the most vociferous -- about trying to establish command authority in a very tense situation. And it's unclear to me, at this time, what the command authority structure is in the United States Government on national security matters. Is Mr. Meese in charge of it? Is it yourself? Is it Cap Weinberger? Is it the National Security Council Director, Mr. Allen?

SECRETARY HAIG: Well, I think it's very clear, and none of the names that you've mentioned are confused about it. It's the President. And the President was aware of this situation. He personally approved the exercise. He personally approved the rules of engagement, which were standard, but which were strongly reaffirmed by the President. And everything that the President personally approved was followed in a very coherent way.

I must say, the other evening, with two of our principals out of town, when this situation developed, we had a task force in the State Department working closely with the National Military Command Center, in constant contact with myself, with Cap Weinberger, with Ed Meese, with Bill Casey, Director of the CIA, and with Dick Allen. And we were all in constant communication throughout the period.

So, I don't know how we could have had a more successfully managed crisis, if you will.

And incidentally, both Cap and I spoke to the Vice President, who was vacationing in Maine, as you know, and who followed the events minute-by-minute.

VANOCUR: Well, isn't everything you've just said going to give ammunition to people who say, "This was not a surprise to the United States. It was anticipated"?

SECRETARY HAIG: Well, I don't think the resort to violence is ever anticipated. But I wouldn't suggest for a moment that we were naïve about the possibility, given the track record of Mr. Qaddafi over a number of years. Surely, we anticipated that it could happen, and we were ready if it were to happen.

BARRIE DUNSMORE: Mr. Secretary, now that you've had a chance to analyze all of the data, do you believe that this was a premeditated action taken on the advice of Colonel Qaddafi? Or was it something that the pilot did on the spur of the moment?

SECRETARY HAIG: Well, I don't believe it was a spur-of-the-moment pilot accidental action, if you will. I think the tapes that have been revealed of the exchanges that occurred after the event would suggest that the pilots were on a targeted mission. They clearly announced the fact that they had -- the one aircraft had released its missile. I'm not one that believes these kinds of things, in a disciplined organization, even one of varied nationalities, such as may be the case in Libya, are not pretty carefully managed and controlled.

DUNSMORE: What would be the purpose of their doing that? And what do you think the consequences are likely to be? If you expected that it was premeditated, you must be waiting for the other shoe to fall.

SECRETARY HAIG: No. I think the incident is behind us. I think it was a testing incident. It may have been an accidental one. We can't discount that. But I'm inclined to believe it was a testing incident. We've had others in the past, over the last five years, not only in the disputed area in which this incident occurred, but beyond there, where there've been harassing and provocative actions taken by Libyan aircraft. There've been what I call transmissions of a highly provocative character which suggested Libyan aircraft were targeted against aircraft of the United States which were transiting in international airspace.

So, we must be prepared, of course, as we are, for some additional challenges or provocations, if you will. But I'm inclined to believe that the action taken, which was cleared by the President beforehand, with clear delegation of authority to our local commanders, will be an effective termination of similar events in the near future. And I would hope so.

VANOCUR: Mr. Secretary, in terms of what happened this past week, how is this going to affect what you refer to as the strategic consensus that's emerging in the Middle East. You have now -- President Sadat has offered us the use of facilities at Ras Banass (?). You have Prime Minister Begin coming in September. And in a speech he made to the Knesset, which got very little attention, he revived what he said before about the possibility of a defense pact with the United States.

What is emerging here? There is a strategic shift, somehow, is there not?

SECRETARY HAIG: Yes. And you'll recall I mentioned this, against some skeptical background, in May, at the time of my visit to the Middle East, April and May. At that time, I was not talking about constructing a consensus, but recognizing that one was developing as a result of historic events. The war between Iraq and Iran, the collapse of the Shah, the Soviet blatant interventionism in Afghanistan have all alerted a number of Arab

states not only to the historic frustrations of the Middle East peace process, but also to the vulnerability of the area to Soviet interventionism. And I think these are welcomed historic developments which are going to offer improved opportunity for the peace process itself.

VANOCUR: The key to the peace process is Lebanon. And I believe you received, the State Department received a letter from Prime Minister Begin Monday night in which he has asked you, when is special envoy Philip Habib coming back? Have you answered him yet?

SECRETARY HAIG: No. I'm preparing a response to Mr. Begin's letter, which was a very detailed and welcomed letter. Of course, we are prepared to send Phil back in as soon as the President feels that his presence there is going to make a constructive contribution to the process.

August is a difficult month, not only in Europe, but in the Middle East as well, when many of the key officials are traveling, even though there's tension in the area.

We are working now, within the United Nations, to strengthen the UNAFIL role along the Israeli border with Lebanon. We are working, along with our European partners and certain Middle Eastern moderate Arab states, to strengthen the central government of Lebanon. And we are working, of course, within the four-party Arab League follow-up group, the group that Phil Habib had worked so actively with in the two phases of his visits. And all of this is in place and moving.

I think as soon as it's going to be beneficial for Phil to go back, the President will send him there.

DUNSMORE: Just one more question about Libya. It is part of State Department folklore that at one time you gave an off-the-record interview in which you described Colonel Qaddafi as a cancer which has to be removed. Did you ever say anything along those lines?

SECRETARY HAIG: Well, if I were to have said that on background and if I now say it on foreground, then I would be violating the background rules, which apparently some feel free to do.

Let me say this. I've made no bones about the concern I have felt and that I know President Reagan feels for the lawlessness that has characterized Mr. Qaddafi's international behavior: support for terrorism; blatant invasion of neighboring states, where today his forces occupy Chad; efforts to subvert and to replace existing governments along all of his borders. This kind of -- and activity in support of terrorism even in this

hemisphere.

I think these are unacceptable norms of international behavior. And it's in our interest, in the American people's interest, and in the international community's interest to no longer overlook these illegal activities, whether they come from Libya, Cuba, or the Soviet Union.

And after all, one must bear in mind that Libya today is armed far beyond its defense needs, and it is the Soviet Union that provides the means to permit this situation to go on.

So, it isn't an exclusive preoccupation with Mr. Qaddafi or Mr. Castro or, for that matter, the Soviet leadership; but a situation which the time has long since passed where the Free World and the United States, as the leader of the Free World, must stand up and be heard on these issues.

DUNSMORE: Well, that takes us to the subject of U.S.-Soviet relations. And last week on this program an adviser to President Brezhnev, Dr. Georgi Arbatov, said that he was not at all optimistic about the prospects for your meeting with Andrei Gromyko next month.

How do you read that reaction, and what is your own assessment of that meeting?

SECRETARY HAIG: Well, that's a disappointing commentary from a Soviet official, who I would hope would be more interested in suggesting that perhaps there is some hope for progress in a dialogue which has been rather strained over the last seven months.

My own view is that there's been no lack of communication between ourselves and the Soviet leadership. Over 50 official contacts in seven months, a half a dozen written formal communications with the Soviet leadership, including one personal one from the President.

I think the problem is not communication. The problem is that the Soviet leadership, thus far, has not liked what they've heard from this Administration.

Now, I have made it clear in my speech in New Orleans two weeks ago that we are prepared to meet the Soviet leadership halfway and we are anxious for an improvement in the dialogue. But such improvement can only follow some reining in, some restraint, if you will, of what has been six years of unacceptable Soviet international behavior.

VANOCUR: We'll be back in just a moment with more Issues and Answers.

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DUNSMORE: Mr. Secretary, getting back to the meeting with Gromyko next month. What are your basic objectives for that meeting?

SECRETARY HAIG: Well, I think it's important for our viewers to recognize that this is the first ministerial-level meeting with this Administration and the Soviet leadership.

Clearly, one of the major items on the agenda is the theater nuclear force arms control negotiations, which I anticipate will be a large portion of our discussion area. And hopefully we'll fix a date and a location for the resumption of those talks, which are already bracketed now between mid-November and mid-December.

Secondly, I would expect to discuss a number of world crisis situations or tension spots: Afghanistan, Kampuchea, Soviet proxy interventionism, trade, broader arms control aspects of our relationships, and any subject that the Soviet leadership itself wants raised. But I think these are the general areas that there will be an exchange of view on.

Now, I don't anticipate, Barrie, that we're going to have any wowing breakthroughs in a meeting, engagement of this kind. More than likely, what we will have is some rather stiff exchanges, one side expressing its concerns to the other. And hopefully that would be followed itself by additional ministerial discussions, which I would hope would ultimately lead to a summit-level meeting between our President and President Brezhnev.

DUNSMORE: Is it possible to have any meaningful negotiations on the question of limiting nuclear weapons in Europe when you aren't at the same time limiting strategic nuclear weapons that both sides have?

SECRETARY HAIG: Well, clearly, I think this is a possibility, just as we've been able to carry on strategic discussions without the involvement of theater systems. We can now get into the theater area. We're talking about long-range systems, the SS-20 and corresponding Western systems, the Pershing and the ground-based cruise and air-launched cruise.

All of these things will be discussed, and I think constructively. And we certainly enter into these talks with a very serious intent of getting meaningful, balanced, verifiable and equitable arms control agreements.

VANOCUR: Mr. Secretary, is it possible to really plan a long-term negotiating strategy without some important decisions having been made on some weapons systems, bombers and, of course, the MX missile, which was discussed this week in California? You come down on the side of making it a land-based

weapon.

SECRETARY HAIG: Well, I don't make it a habit, although some do, of raising in public forums the recommendations I'll make to the President on issues on which he has yet to make his decision.

Let me say this. Sure, these decisions, which the President is about to make, with respect to the modernization of our strategic inventory will have a profound impact on future SALT negotiations, on strategic discussion.

Let me say this as well, because there's been a lot of speculation in the press recently about who's voting for what and who's being [unintelligible] and who's winning and who's losing. I have never seen in the five Administrations that I've served at a fairly high level, and have been always involved in these strategic issues, a case where in a brief period of seven months the Secretary of Defense has pulled together so comprehensive an approach and so comprehensive a package for the President to consider. And I personally could do nothing but compliment Cap Weinberger for the way he's approached it.

Now, there are a number of decisions, a number of options that are available to the President to make a decision on. He hasn't done so yet. And I think we're all best served in this Administration -- and, frankly, in the press -- to reserve our judgments until the President makes these decisions.

I'm one that has always supported a triad of capabilities: land-, sea-, and air-based systems. And I feel confident that the ultimate mix the President approves will have those fundamental characteristics inherently in it.

VANOCUR: One decision the President has made concerning weapons is the sale of AWACS reconnaissance planes to Saudi Arabia and enhancement for the F-15s that were approved several years ago. That announcement's supposed to come out tomorrow, giving the legislative timetable: September 9th, informal notification; September 28th, formal notification. It's going to be controversial.

In view of what you have, a sense of optimism about the Middle East, aren't you pushing a big mass of chips forward on a controversial issue like this?

SECRETARY HAIG: Well, there's no question that this is a controversial issue. We went into it with our eyes wide open. We got on a fast-moving train, in that regard. There had been discussions along these lines for a number of months and years before this Administration came in.

But the bottom line of the question is this, Sandy. This is a fundamental improvement of United States strategic position in the Middle East. It is going to be an enhancement of our ability to control events, and it is going to be a profound improvement to an ally's ability to preserve and protect the vital oil resources of that region.

Now, we intend to proceed and we intend to win. And I think it is very important that we do so for the vital interests of this country.

VANOCUR: It would be less confrontational, wouldn't it, though, Mr. Secretary, if when Prime Minister Begin is here you can offer something to him -- maybe not the defense pact he has raised now, the pre-positioning of U.S. military material, that would lessen Israel's opposition and mollify its concerns.

SECRETARY HAIG: I suppose one can suggest courses of action. But my experience with the government of Israel and its leadership is not that they're going to be bought off with respect to concerns by goodies that we might offer to enhance their own capability.

I think their concerns are understandable. I think in the period ahead it is our responsibility to explain to them why this system is not going to be an unacceptable risk to their security interest. After all, we have obligations to Israel, and it wouldn't be in America's interest to provide potential aggressors with a capability to aggravate our own ability to fulfill our responsibilities. So we're not going to do that.

Now, that doesn't discount the importance of maintaining the qualitative edge in Israel. And we are indeed prepared to discuss that issue and to address it in finite terms. So it has a de factor relationship.

But I think it would be wrong to suggest that we are indulging in rewards or payoffs for Israeli acquiescence in a decision which stands on its own merits as the right one.

DUNSMORE: We've alluded to this a couple of times on the broadcast, but I'd like to put the question to you this way: In recent weeks, a U.S. Senator and a senior member of the State Department have told me that there is a monumental ideological battle going on for the soul of this Administration, that you are on the side of the moderates, and they don't give you much chance of prevailing.

SECRETARY HAIG: [Laughter]

DUNSMORE: How would you analyze that? What can you tell us about it?

SECRETARY HAIG: Well, Barrie, I suppose that's the most unprecedented label I've received yet, that I'm on the side of the moderates. I've usually been accused of being somewhat to the right of Genghis Khan.

But being that the case, let me tell you, nothing could be farther from the truth. I've never worked with an Administration -- and as I've said, I've worked with five -- in which the philosophic compatibility was more uniform and more in tune with the views of the President of the United States, who, after all, is the elected official and whose views must be the deciding factor on any policy issue.

No, I don't accept that premise at all.

And I've seen a lot of speculation and score-keeping about Cap Weinberger and myself. And I have never seen a situation in which a Secretary of Defense and a Secretary of State were in closer gee with respect to the broad philosophic and policy directions that his country should take.

Now, it doesn't mean that, as the Secretary of State, with diplomatic, foreign policy responsibilities, that I'm not going to differ from time to time with a man who must manage the defense establishment of the United States.

But the bottom line that unites the both us is the vital interests of this country. And I can assure you Cap and I are in very close gee on those subjects.

DUNSMORE: Well, I'll give you one example. On the subject of how we deal with the Europeans, you certainly seem to be much more concerned about taking European consideration into account on a decision, and Mr. Weinberger seems to think that the Europeans, because of a new pacifism there, really almost don't have to be worried about.

SECRETARY HAIG: No. I think that's -- that would be a bum rap to hang on Cap, just as it would that I am preoccupied with their concerns.

It is a foreign policy matter for me to be sensitive to European concerns and to be sure that, to the best of our ability, we meet those concerns. After all, the reality of the current strategic requirement is interdependence. The United States no longer has the luxury of proceeding alone. We see it every day, from Medfly today to air controllers, which are seemingly domestic questions, but which have profound international implications. Surely, we have to do this.

And it's my responsibility to alert the President to concerns in this area. It is not Cap's. And were he to be a

proponent for that; he'd probably be out of his own reservation. That doesn't mean that we are in fundamental difference on any issue. And I'm not aware that we are.

VANOCUR: Mr. Secretary, you were fond, back when you took office, of quoting, the Jackson Subcommittee hearings on National Security, when you were the vicar of the President in foreign policy, before your vestments got a little ruffled, and in that quote, "The success of a Secretary in influencing his colleagues is directly related to the President's confidence in him and reliance on him."

Do you now, after a stormy passage, have that?

SECRETARY HAIG: Well, I am very, very comfortable with my relationships with President Reagan. There hasn't been an issue that I've been confronted with since I've been here that I haven't had a hearing and that in most cases I have not been sustained.

Where I haven't -- and I think of two particular cases. And that's all -- I understood completely of why the President, with his broader responsibilities, had to go the way he did.

VANOCUR: We'll have to get you back some other time to give us those two instances.

Thank you very much for joining us, Mr. Secretary.